

edible SAN DIEGO

Behind the Bar with Mike Camello of Kástra Elión Vodka

Mike Camello tells us where we can find Kástra Elión—a premium sipping vodka distilled from Greek olives—in San Diego plus tips for how to make an arugula gimlet

Tell us about yourself and where you live.

I'm Mike Camello, the president of [Kástra Elión](#), and I currently live in Los Angeles.

What makes Kástra Elión unique to the food and beverage industry?

Frank Mihalopoulos, one of our Kástra Elión Vodka founders, has been a pioneer in the F&B industry. He is a certified flavor chemist and created the Cappuccino Blast for Dunkin' Donuts. He's worked with major spirit companies like Absolut, Stolichnaya, and Kahlúa so we've been able to use his knowledge and experience in the industry.

Where can we find Kástra Elión in San Diego?

You can find Kástra Elión on the menu at various bars and restaurants including, Athens Market Taverna, Born and Raised, The Bottle House, Bristol Farms, Del Mesa Food & Liquor, Kindred, Keg N Bottle, Mezé Greek Fusion, Queenstown Public House, and Raised by Wolves.

What's a good drink you've had recently?

I think we can speak for many when we say we've seen that the espresso martini has had a big resurgence in popularity. Once we crafted our version with Kástra Elión, it became a quick family favorite and go-to for a post-dinner cocktail.



What are your essential bar or kitchen tips, shortcuts, and tools?

For us, we like to use fresh ingredients in everything we make. It really makes a difference when you pull the whole cocktail together. For our martini series, we make our own brines completely fresh from start to finish, including Lemon Oregano, Dirty Brine, and a Mediterranean Garden.

Do you have a drink recipe you'd like to share?

We have a great cocktail—it's called Roquette—which was created by Matthew Biancaniello, a famed cocktail chef. It is an arugula gimlet, which has an amazing bright green color and unique spice that comes through from the greens. Here are the ingredients:

- 2 ounces Kástra Elión
- 3/4 ounces fresh lime juice
- 3/4 ounces agave syrup (1.1)
- 1 cup of muddled Arugula

Prepare as you would a general gimlet and strain to serve.

What seasonal ingredients and drinks are you enjoying?

We're nearing the end of the olive harvest season in Greece. It brings the nostalgia of fall and winter flavors. Right now we are working with some flavors like fig and honey. One of our go-to cocktails we have tweaked for the season is the Kástra Lemeli (a play on our Bee's Knees cocktail) adding in our twist—Kástra Elión, fresh lemon, Greek fig honey syrup, and garnish with a sprig of thyme.

What do you love about San Diego's food and beverage scene?

I think San Diego's cuisine as a whole has diversified even more in the past year or so, which has been fun to experience and see as people in the industry. But, whenever we're in town we make it a must to get classic fish tacos and any seafood dish.

What is your favorite San Diego bar and restaurant? Where do you like to shop for food and drinks?

I will say, we're pretty lucky that this is such a tough question. How do you narrow it down! [Meze Greek Fusion](#) is a great fast-casual stop. [Born and Raised](#) is a nice spot to elevate the evening a little, and get a classic, delicious steak paired with the perfect cocktail. [Raised by Wolves](#) has an amazing bar, too. For liquor stores, [Keg N Bottle](#) is always a solid option with a great selection.

Would you like to give a shout-out to a favorite grower or farm?

[Gourmet Sweet Botanicals](#) is one of our favorite. They supply us with amazing microgreens, petite greens, edible flowers, and tiny veggies for our cocktails.

What steps do you take to support a sustainable food system and why are these values important to you?

We prioritize supporting local farmers when collecting cocktail ingredients for events and focus on securing accounts with businesses that prioritize local or organic products for menu items. This is important to us since our vodka is derived from Greek olives and grains; we want to support those in the industry the best we can.

How would you like to connect to the *Edible San Diego* food community and why?

We are very inspired by chefs and different cuisines. We love to do food pairings with our cocktails and are excited about bringing these events to the San Diego market.